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Jamaica

Agricultural Biotechnology Annual

Jamaica's Biotechnology Report 2013

Approved By:

Morgan Perkins

Prepared By:

Courtland S. Grant

Report Highlights:

There is no commercial production of genetically engineered (GE) crops in Jamaica. At present, Jamaica's biotechnology and bio-safety environment does not accommodate the deregulation and commercialization of products of modern biotechnology. It should be noted that Jamaica ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-safety (CPB) on December 24, 2012.

Section I. Executive Summary:

Jamaica is an important market for U.S. bulk agricultural products (corn, rice and wheat), intermediate products (soybean meal), and high value products (refined soybean oils, snack foods, etc), with a total value of approximately USD 350 million. In the future, imports of U.S. food and agricultural products will be influenced increasingly by the nature of Jamaica's biotechnology and bio-safety policies. Jamaica ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-safety (CPB) on December 24, 2012. The present regulatory framework governing the importation, development and use of the products of modern biotechnology is in the draft stage. Regulations for the importation of genetically engineered (GE) organisms for laboratory purposes are well established. However, Jamaica prohibits the commercial introduction of living modified organisms (LMO) for planting.

Section II. Plant Biotechnology Trade and Production:

There is no commercial production of transgenic (biotechnology) crops in Jamaica. The Biotechnology Center at the University of the West Indies continues to work on developing a transgenic variety of papaya (*Carica papaya* L) that is resistant to the Papaya Ringspot Virus. Laboratory work is also being conducted to develop virus-resistant transgenic hot pepper and tomato cultivars. Jamaica's National Biotechnology Strategy extensively incorporates the potential to apply the tools of modern biotechnology to specific crops that are of economic importance to Jamaica, including hot pepper (*Capsicum chinense*), pumpkin (*Cucubita pepo* L.) and citrus (*Citrus sinensis*).

Jamaica's present biotechnology and bio-safety legal framework does not establish procedures or conditions for the deregulation and commercialization of products of modern biotechnology. This could be partly the influence of the relatively low level of private enterprise interest in commercial agricultural biotechnology.

Jamaica has no regulations governing the importation of Living Modified Organisms (LMO) for animal feed or processing (such as grain corn and soybean), or high value products that are derived from genetically engineered (GE) crops (such as cooking oil). However, there are regulations governing the importation of LMOs for experimental purposes. The importation of LMOs for intentional commercial release into the natural environment is prohibited. Jamaica's draft Biosafety Policy Act has not been approved by the Parliament. The instruments which were submitted to the political directorate are still in draft submission. The biotechnology policy is also in a draft format to be acted upon by the Jamaican Cabinet. It is not clear when or if further action will be forthcoming, however, Jamaica did ratify the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) on December 24, 2012.

Jamaica's livestock industry utilizes a large amount of imported grains (corn and soybeans) from the United States. Currently, there is no identity preservation (IP) program, or other regulations in Jamaica that requires the segregation of shipments of grains, or other bulk agricultural commodities into GE-free products, or that establishes tolerances for adventitious presence of GE products. At the retail level, processed products are not monitored or regulated for GE content, despite intermittent calls from consumer groups for mandatory labeling of such products. The draft National Bio-Safety Policy explicitly states the need for mandatory labeling of products of modern biotechnology.

It should be noted that under the Plants Quarantine Act, Jamaica's Plants (Importation) Control Regulations of 1997 governs the importation of LMOs for the purpose of experimentation under controlled conditions. The regulations require that all importers must apply to the National Bio-safety Committee (NBC) for permission to import such products, and upon approval, the application is submitted to the Plant Quarantine Division for granting of a permit by the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer. The NBC considers, chief among an array of variables, the importer's ability to enforce adequate procedures and safeguards to ensure that no contamination by or release of the plant, seed, cutting, or other plant parts, which is detrimental to the health or safety of any human, animal or other living organism will occur at the port of entry or in the country.

In addition to very stringent stipulations on the physical characteristics of the packaging container, materials, and the size of the plant or plant part, the regulation requires that individual packages be labeled, indicating, inter alia: the content, place of origin, name and address of consignee and consignor, along with respective telephone numbers, a statement indicating that the propagation material is derived from genetic engineering procedures and possesses novel traits along with the notation, "For experimentation purposes only, not for sale or reuse." Despite the existence of the regulations, interests in experiments with imported LMOs are insignificant.

Section III. Plant Biotechnology Policy:

Jamaica is a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and is currently drafting a comprehensive biosafety-specific legislation and policy (National Biosafety Framework) to support the ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-safety (CPB), and the full implementation of its relevant provisions. In accordance with the CPB, the draft National Bio-safety Framework focuses primarily on developing regulations to ensure adequate protection in the transfer (import, export and transit), handling, contained use, deliberate release or placing on the market of any LMOs. The Framework specifically addresses LMOs for intentional introduction into the natural environment, and GE's that are to be used directly for food, feed or processing, omitting pharmaceutical products and high-value products derived from GE's.

Although the framework gives adequate consideration to the use of science-based risk assessment, given Jamaica's lack of capacity in conducting risk analyses, the implementation of the framework is expected to be heavily skewed towards adopting the precautionary principle, as provided for in Article 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and reiterated in the CPB. In fact, Jamaica's draft National Biotechnology strategy accommodates risk analysis based on the precautionary principle. The Biosafety Policy and Act were expected to be legislated as far back as 2010, but remain pending.

Presently, Jamaica has a fragmented institutional structure for the regulation of activities and procedures relevant to biotechnology and bio-safety. The Ministry of Agriculture administers the Plant Quarantine and Animal (Disease and Importation) Acts. The Plant Quarantine Division and the Veterinary Services Division regulate the importation of plants and plant parts, and live animals and animal products, respectively. The National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) administers the Natural Resources and Conservation Act, which directly relates to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The Ministry of Health administers the Food and Drug Act, the Pharmacy Act, the Pesticides Act and the Public Health Act. The Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce

administers the Standards Act, under which labeling policies are developed. The National Bio-safety and National Biotechnology Coordinating Committees are mandated to develop procedural guidelines for the importation, production, development and use of products of biotechnology in Jamaica, and advise the government on issues pertaining to biotechnology and bio-safety. The NBC also grants approval for the importation of LMOs for experimental purposes. The NBC is representative of a broad cross-section of government agencies, the private sector and civil society. Under the Bio-Safety Strategy, there should be significant institutional rationalization to establish a Competent Authority and National Focal Point, pursuant to the obligations of the CPB. Furthermore, increased regulatory harmonization across the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is one of the goals espoused in Jamaica's draft biotechnology strategy.

Jamaica has shown commitment to the tenets of the CPB, including the Advance Information Agreement, which provides strict guidelines for the importation of LMOs for intentional release into the environment. Jamaica is expected to adopt, in full, the strict language of the CPB governing such imports. The country has established a bio-safety clearing-house (BCH) and is actively exchanging information with other contracting parties. With respect to LMOs for feed, food or processing, the national strategy is also expected to reflect the text of the CPB. Labeling of products derived from genetic engineering remains one of the most contentious topics for consumers and consumer groups in Jamaica. The general consensus among consumer groups, policy makers, and scientists is to legislate mandatory labeling of all products derived from or containing products of genetic engineering, irrespective of the extent of detectable modified DNA or protein.

The field trial of transgenic papaya in Jamaica makes this the only transgenic product to progress to this stage in Jamaica, and was limited to a one-acre plot located in the central region of the country. There are guidelines developed by the NBC to monitor the field-trial process. Jamaica does not, however, allow field-testing of LMOs that are developed outside of the borders of the country. Further, Jamaica does not allow the commercial production of transgenic products, though the NBC has established guidelines for minimum distance between transgenic varieties (trials) and other conventional products of the same genus. Apart from the scientific justification of not planting adjacent trial transgenic and conventional fields, Jamaica is concerned with possible market repercussions in the European Union from its biotechnology program. In fact, the position adopted by Jamaican regulators, with respect to mandatory labeling of GE, is possibly influenced by existing European policies. The Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM (Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific – ACP – States) countries and the European Union give further necessity for Jamaica to carefully consider its biotechnology program.

Section IV. Plant Biotechnology Marketing Issues:

Jamaica's Consumer Affairs Commission and the National Consumer League have repeatedly asserted their position on the mandatory labeling of products derived from GE, espousing consumers' right to full information to make informed purchasing decisions. Retailers, bulk commodity importers, and livestock farmers have shown the strongest support for GE in Jamaica. Their views are rationalized based on the price competitiveness and nutritional enhancement of GE products. The mandatory labeling of GE products should not significantly affect the imports of bulk agricultural commodities, if it is not associated with an identity preservation program. In the latter case this would increase the price of

grains and animal feeds to the livestock sector. Given the importance of the livestock industry to Jamaica's agricultural sector, an IP program is not anticipated in the legislation. On the retail side, however, mandatory labeling of such products could produce a negative response by consumers. The positive attitudes of Jamaican retailers and scientists towards products derived from GE, and a relatively diverse domestic media environment would possibly facilitate marketing of biotechnology in Jamaica. Additionally, per capita income, and price sensitivity of the Jamaican consumer market will not support the types of consumption discriminations as observed in Europe and other developed territories.

Section V. Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach:

Jamaica continues to build technical capacities in biotechnology through its academic programs and research centers. Stronger collaboration with international institutions could assist the country in advancing its biotechnology agenda and realizing the associated socio- economic benefits. Expertise in the areas of bio-safety risk analysis, traceability and testing, and deregulation and commercialization protocol, are crucial to the country's biotechnology program. USDA's efforts in this respect have focused on bio-safety risk analysis and information exchange at the governmental level.

Section VI. Animal Biotechnology:

As of this time the Government of Jamaica has not developed policies to address animal biotechnology, and it is not contemplated in pending legislation.

Section VII. Author Defined:

Courtland Grant, Foreign Service National, Agricultural Specialist, Kingston, Jamaica